



Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University

# Collaboration Matters!

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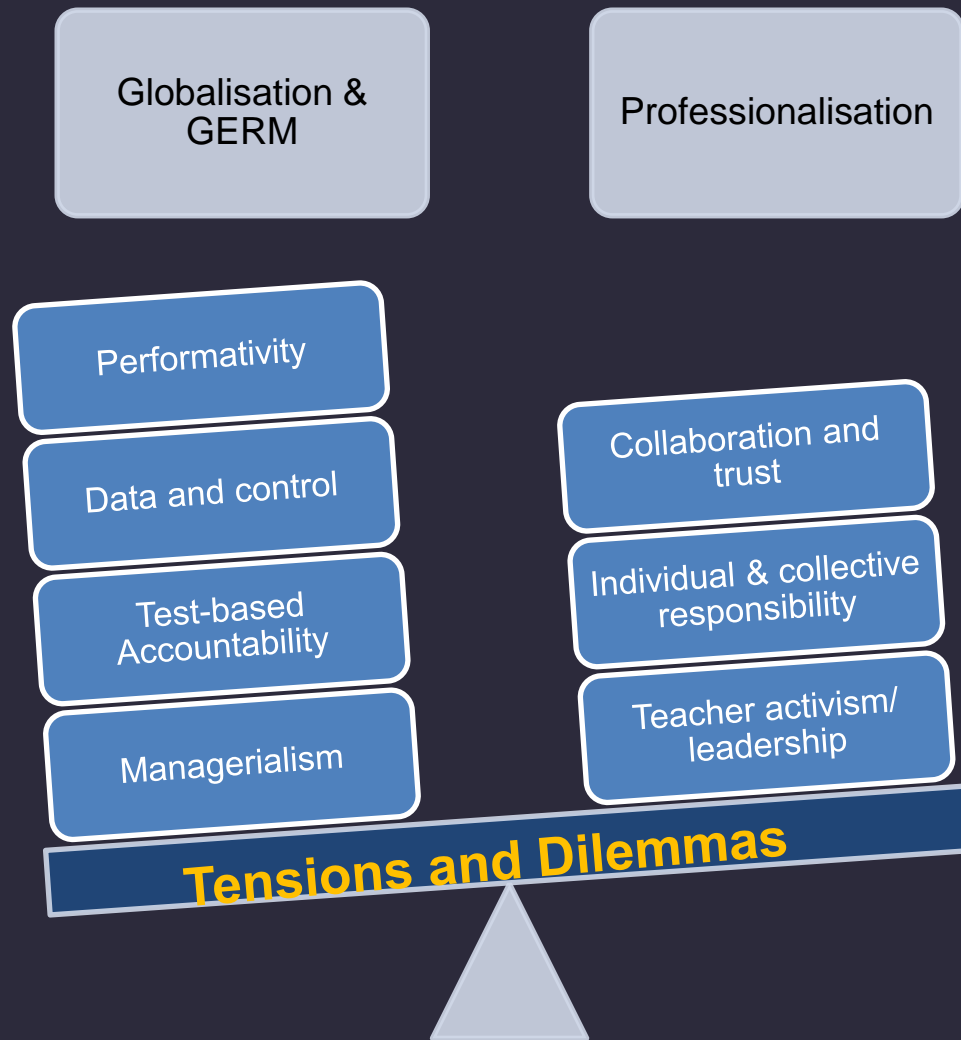
# DCU Institute of Education

# Overview

- Context for Collaboration
- Defining collaboration
- Challenges and Barriers
- Paving a way forward



# Context: Education as economic policy



# Context: Professional Capital

- Human Capital
  - Development of teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching (Entrants, ITE, CPD)
- Social Capital
  - Teachers working collaboratively
  - Sharing other people's human capital
- Decisional Capital
  - HC + SC + DC (decision-making and judgements)
    - (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012)

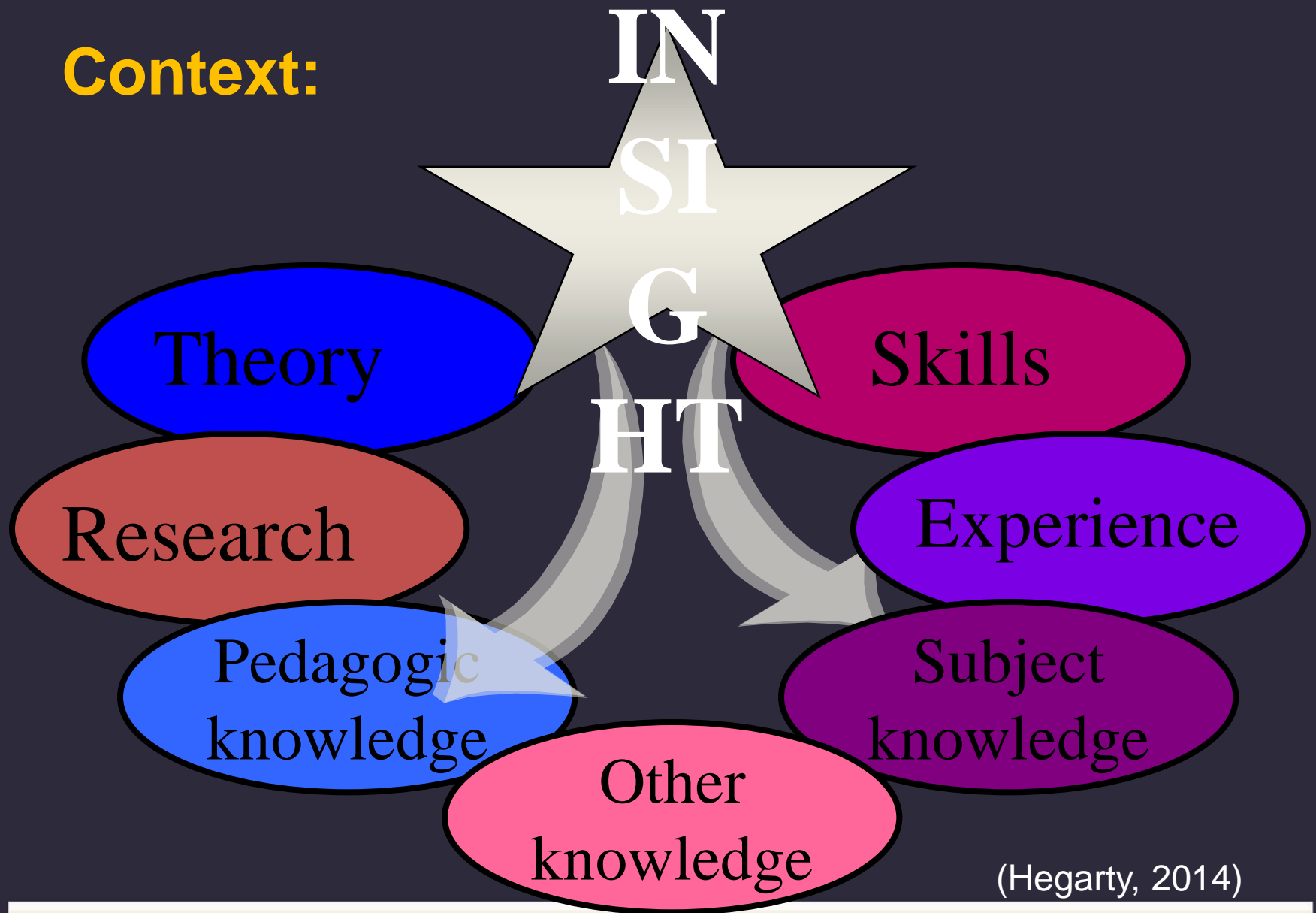


# Context: Complexity of teaching

## *Teachers' specialist or expert knowledge*

- Content knowledge
  - Pedagogic knowledge
  - Curricular knowledge
  - Pedagogic content knowledge
  - Knowledge of learners
  - Knowledge of educational contexts
- most challenging, most demanding, subtle, nuanced and frightening activity that our species has ever invented.  
(Shulman, 1987)

**Context:**



(Hegarty, 2014)



# Social capital...but...

- ‘Lonely profession’, always in pejorative terms
- Isolated profession...’limits access to new ideas and better solutions, drives stress inward to fester and accumulate, fails to recognise and praise success, and permits incompetence to exist and persist to the detriment of pupils, colleagues, and the teachers themselves. Isolation allows, even if it does not always produce, conservatism and resistance to innovation in teaching’ (Hargreaves and Fullan 1992:11)
- Work in isolation- “fail to lighten the load” (Kugelmass, 2001: 51)

# Poll

- individual practice still reigns (O'Sullivan 2011; Eivers and Clerkin 2013).
- From your own experience in education is it a lonely profession or an isolated profession where individual practice still reigns?





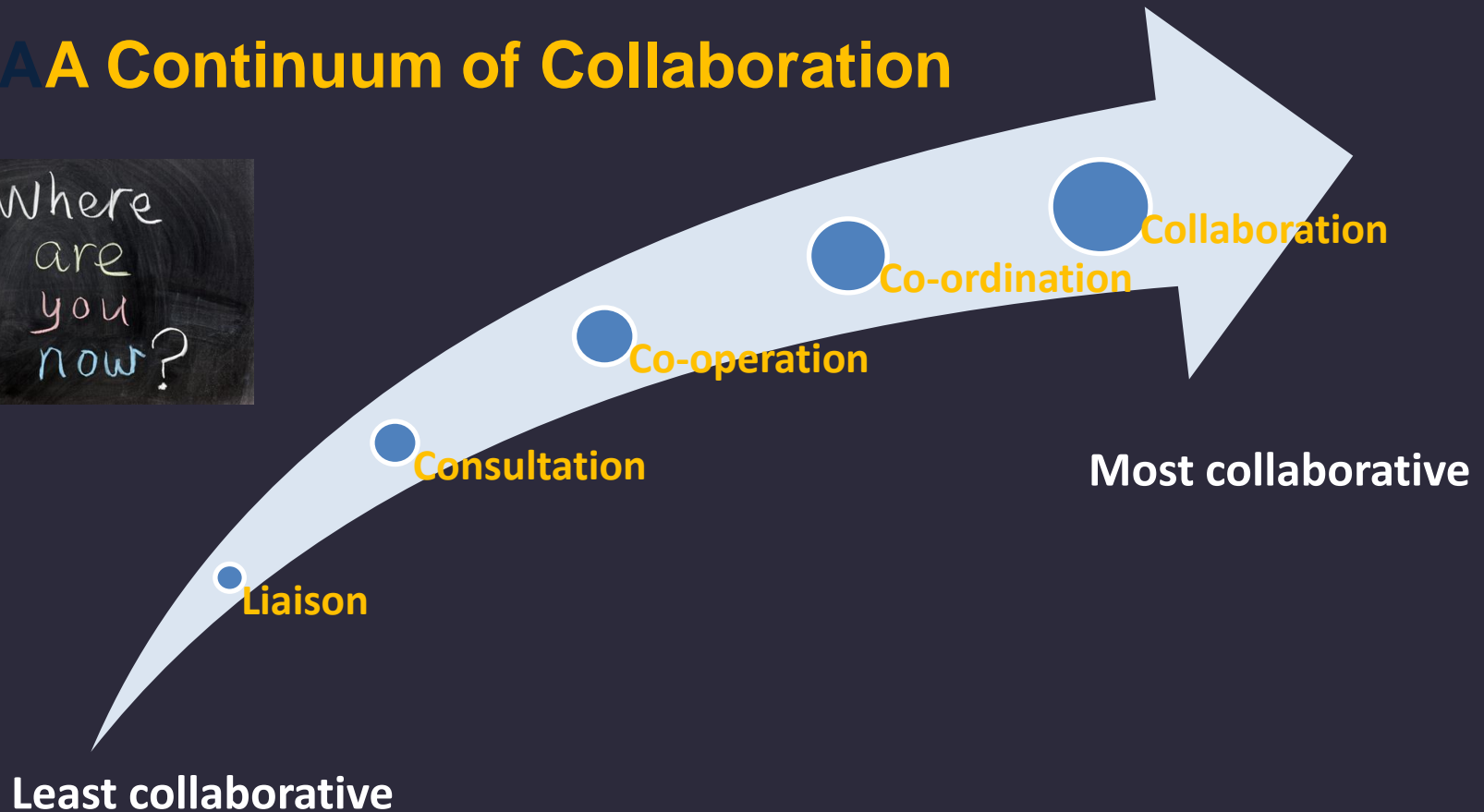
# Social Capital

- Teachers working collaboratively
- Sharing other people's human capital

## **But what is collaboration...working towards a definition...**

“... a process by which people work co-operatively together to accomplish a task, or series of tasks, of benefit to one or more people by reaching a mutual understanding of how to solve problems and resolve complex ethical and practical dilemmas,.....” (Devecchi and Rouse, 2010)

# AA Continuum of Collaboration



(Lacey, 2001; Cook and Friend, 2010; Moran 2007)

# Another continuum...

At what level is collaboration?

Sharing  
Planning

Sharing  
resources

Sharing Teaching

Sharing Observation

Sharing Feedback

Sharing Improvement

(O'Sullivan, 2011)



# Collaboration...

- Exchange
- Division of work
- Co- construction

(Webs et al., 2016)

# Put simply...collaboration is . . .

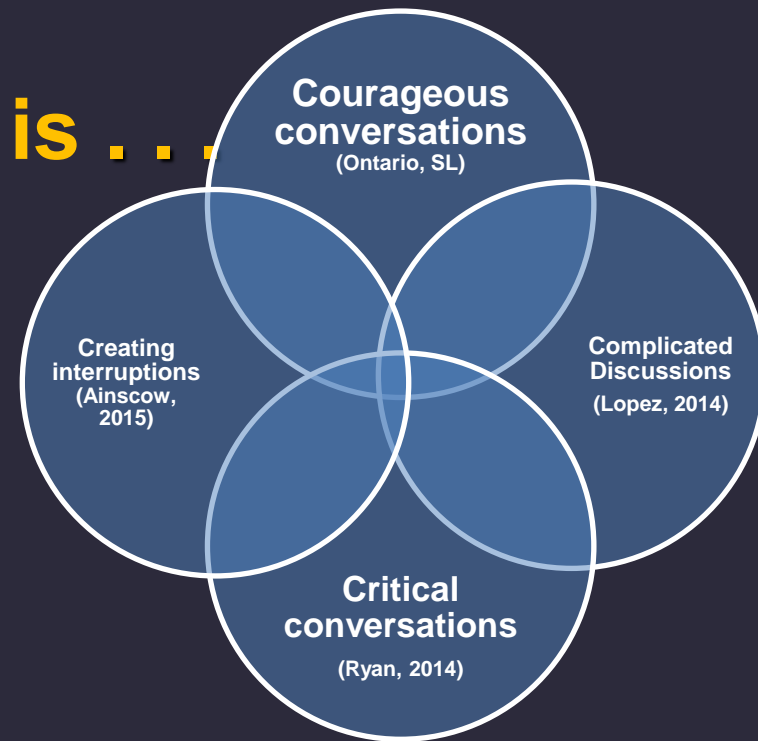
Teachers talking about teaching and learning

Collaboration enables us to develop a language of practice

Joint planning, designing, researching, evaluating/preparing of teaching materials

Teachers working together in classrooms

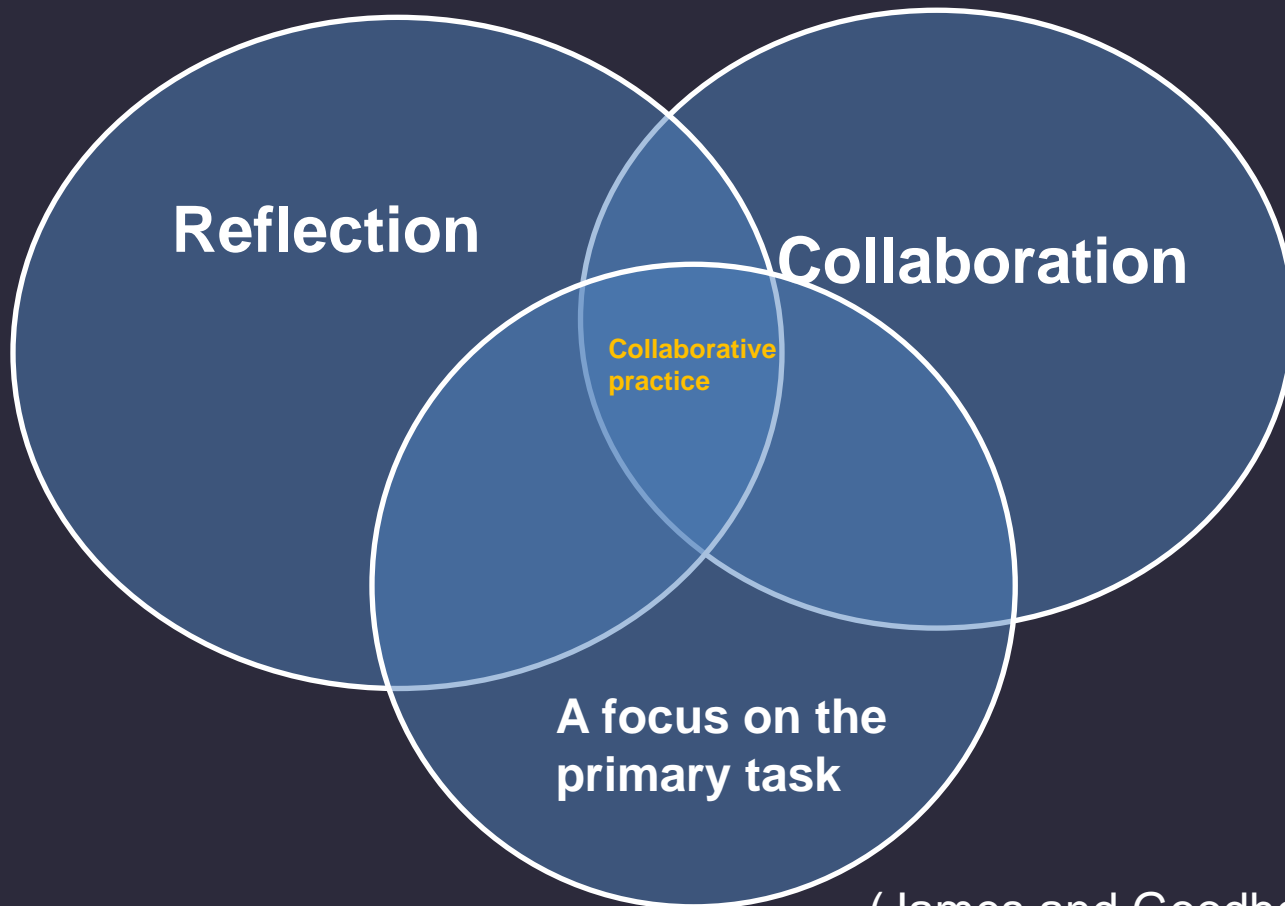
(Hargreaves and Fullan 1992)



# Teachers talking about teaching

- Most of the professional knowledge teachers use in their daily work is **tacit**.. Rarely made explicit with colleagues... (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), 2008)
- Teachers find it difficult to talk about what they do and why they do it... because they work in isolation...engage language of thinking...move knowledge around... (Ainscow, 2015)
- Knowledge mobilization (Brown et al., 2015)
- *Collaboration . . . necessary, but not sufficient ...* (Stevenson, 2011)

# Collaborative Practice Analytical Framework



(James and Goodhew, 2011)



# So collaboration isn't . . .

- Sharing resources, but not joint development
- Being friendly - 'we get along really well'
- Not just a 'group think'
- Staying outside the classroom door
- Contrived collegiality...top-down
  - but can provide impetus for collaboration
  - can also be a barrier

(Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992)

# Poll

- From your own experience in education do we engage in collaborative practice?
- What forms of collaborative practice?



# With whom, why?

- With pupils and among pupils
  - Student voice central to professional learning
  - Article 12 UNCRC (1991)
  - group work...
- Parents
- Teachers:
  - Co-teaching
  - Peer observation
  - Lesson study...
- SNAs
- Teachers in other schools...
- All partners in education and beyond-across disciplines

# Beliefs and practices

- Gap between idealism and practice?
- Independent V interdependent (Heldens et al., 2015)
- Value collaborative practice, collaborative CPD (Pedder et al., 2008; King, 2014)... does it happen in practice (Frost, 2012)?
- Inclusive and special education- importance of collaboration and collaborative practice... yet findings from O'Gorman and Drudy (2010) (c 800 teachers) show collaboration focused elements least important

# Challenges and Barriers

- Not enough **time** (timetabling, consultation, formal & informal meetings, poor use of meeting time) (Travers et al. 2010)
- No confidential **space** for discussion
- Added **strain** of working with another person / people
- Fear of **role boundaries** becoming blurred
- Fear of **loss of autonomy** / independent control
- Concerns over **confidentiality and trust**
- **Language barriers** and **different cultural values** and expectations (Day and Prunty, 2015)

# Barriers to Collaboration

- **Across disciplines:**
  - Major differences between education, health, social work management structures, working conditions and hours.
  - Different perspectives, ethics and mindsets as a result of different training.
  - Lack of shared knowledge
  - Case-load pressures
  - Use of different and sometimes intimidating terminology across disciplines
  - Mismatch of expectations

(Travers et al. 2010; King, 2011)

# Barriers to Collaboration

- With students:
  - Children's capacity to meaningfully contribute to decision-making
  - Concern it will undermine adult authority
  - Too much effort and time (Lundy, 2007)
- Mandated (contrived collegiality)
- Lack of support (Travers et al. 2010; King, 2011)



# Addressing Challenges and Barriers

- Collective will to make it happen (Chapman et al., 2012)
- Change begins with ourselves...desire to change... change-agent (King, 2016)
  - Unhappy
  - Values – moral purpose/ making a difference (Looney, 2013)
- '*living contradiction*' (Whitehead, 1989)
- Moral purpose keeps us close to the needs of children; change agency causes us to develop better strategies for accomplishing our moral goals (3)

# Addressing Challenges and Barriers

- Role of Leadership (King, 2011):
  - Alignment between principals and teachers' values
  - Creating organisational capacity for change
    - Not mandated...
    - Attending collaborative discussions- value it
    - Time to plan, reflect and consolidate learning
    - Non-contact time... on the agenda...timetabling
    - Resources
    - No micromanagement
    - Trusting teachers/staff
  - Empowering teachers to create collaborative cultures
    - Fostering collaborative cultures of learning
    - Encouraging teachers to become leaders e.g. modelling practices for others
    - Facilitating distributed leadership
    - Developing Professional Learning Communities
    - Hiring staff that are open to collaboration and collaborative practice

# Collaborative Learning Initiative (CLI)

*A good news story...*



# CLI values:

- Teachers at the heart of change
- Collaborative working and collective responsibility
- Equality within and across participating groups.
- Valuing professional judgement and expertise
- Research-informed and research-engaged
- Partnerships - teachers, advisors and students
- Knowledge creating and knowledge sharing  
(Stevenson, 2012; King and Feeley, 2014)

# CLI – support from above. . .

Learn to let go

Trust

Encourage

Value and celebrate

Problem-solve – *remove obstacles, don't create them*

Believe

Resource: create time

Work with: 'our' project, not 'your' project

Challenge: upwards and downwards (Stevenson, 2012)

# Collaboration Matters!

- Collaboration and Collaborative Practice
- Student and teacher development
- School improvement
- Take risks together
- Greater capacities for change
- *Systems don't change by themselves...  
actions of individuals and small groups  
working together... (Fullan, 1993)*





Thank you!

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